Chairperson's Report

I would like to thank all our members for their continued support during the past year, as well as those who have attended meetings on an ad hoc basis. I think you will agree that we had a diverse and exciting selection of activities and speakers, which we hope to carry on in 2027.

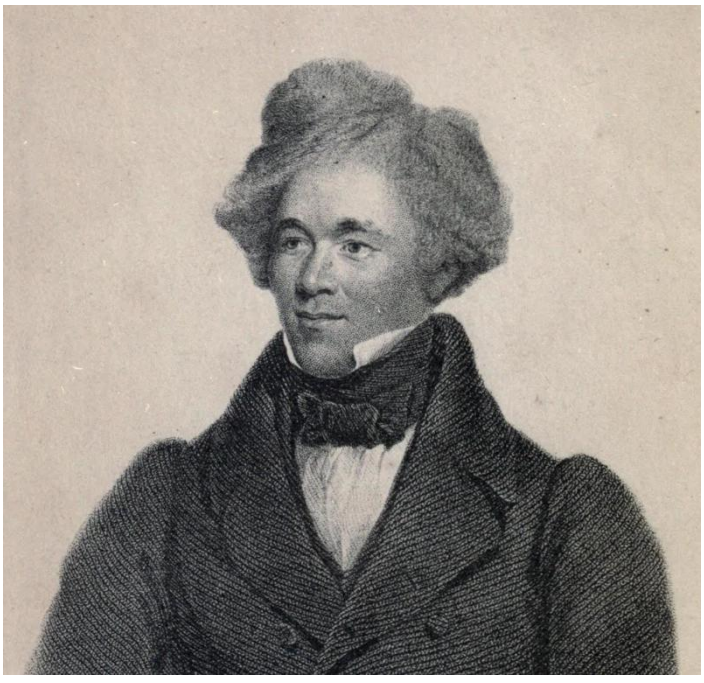




November: At short notice, our speaker was unable to attend. Thankfully Graham O'Connell was able to step in at short notice. Following extensive research of his home, Whitfield Court. Starting in the late 17th century, he was able to talk about the people, marriages, deaths, hardship, and scandal associated with his home.

December: Traditionally, in December we meet for a Christmas lunch. We met at the Loughpool in Sellack, where everyone enjoyed a wonderful meal. I would like to thank David Dawson for organising it.





January: Rhys Griffith spoke about Slavery Connections of Herefordshire. Using records stored at HARC, Rhys followed the trade from the first passage of enslaved people from Africa to the Caribbean, by Jonathan Hawkins in 1560, through several Herefordshire slave traders and eventually leading to the outlawing of ownership of enslaved people in British Colonies by 1807, to finally abolition, in 1833. Some of our beautiful country houses and parkland was built with the proceeds of slavery.

In 1839, after abolition, Moses Roper, an escaped slave (pictured), spoke to a packed audience at the British and Foreign School. The non conformist churches in Ross were pivotal in the anti slavery movement locally.

February: A change to our published programme. Just hours before the meeting, our speaker was unable to attend due to illness in the family.

Mark Eardley spoke about the ancient water craft, the coracle, that were common on the River Wye until the mid 18th century. The talk followed the history, construction, diversity, and decline from use due to legal restraints from rod and line fishermen.

Notably, Luke Hughes (who owned Wilton Wharf) paddled a coracle from Wilton, into The Bristol Channel and then around Lundy Island in 1730's. When he returned, it was celebrated as if he had gone around the World.





March: Dr Andy Moir gave a talk "What Dendrochronology could do for Herefordshire". This is the analysis and comparison of annual tree ring growth, which can be compared with a database to determine when that tree was felled. This provides an exact date, so timber framed buildings can be more accurately dated.

Unlike neighbouring towns, No buildings in the town have been dated using dendrochronology. There is limited funding for small parish projects. Following the talk, The Civic Society committee is developing a plan to raise funds to enable the dendrochronological dating of some of our wooden framed buildings.

April: Local farmer, John Chinn spoke about farming asparagus and vineyards. When he started asparagus production in 2020, the harvesting period was limited to about 2 months. Working with Cambridge University, and by manipulating the cultivation, they now can achieve almost 8-9 months of harvesting (in UK).

He also discussed the culture and fermentation of his wines grown on the south facing slopes of Chase Hill.

We were treated to samples of both green and purple asparagus, together with a glass of a Castlebrook sparkling wine.





May: Our first visit for the year was a visit to The Shell store and to view remains of the Rotherwas Munition Factory, guided by Angela Williams. We met in the refurbished Shell Store building, built around the existing steel frame from 1916. Then it was used to store the shell casings (with part of the original floor preserved to retain the imprints made by shells. It is now a business, conference space and a cafe. From here we walked through the Rotherwas Industrial Estate, viewing remnants of the Ordnance Factory including the site of the fire station, the Thorn Lighting building and HR4K; as well as a tribute to the Canary Girls.

June: We met Marjorie Shackleton who told us about the fable of The Mordiford Dragon. As early as 1670 a plaster effigy of a dragon was on the church wall, which was lost and never replaced after The Great Flood of 1811.
The Mordiford Dragon Trail is brought to life by a series of wooden sculptures and poems illustrating the tale of Maud and her affection for the dragon that once lived in Mordiford, and Garstone (pictured in the barrel), who was employed by villagers to "deal with the dragon problem".





July: Sadly, due to excessively high temperatures, we had to cancel the Ross-on-Wye Willow Walk with Julie Balsam. However, members were invited to the Wye Valley National Landscape launch of the walk on 23 October.

September: David Howerski gave an extremely interesting talk entitled "Commons and Public Rights of Way -The Open Spaces Society in Herefordshire South, What do we do". When David started protecting public areas and rights of way, he realised the need for a law degree, so he could understand people's rights. With examples, his talk demonstrated the importance of knowing public rights and how to deal with them properly to obtain best results.

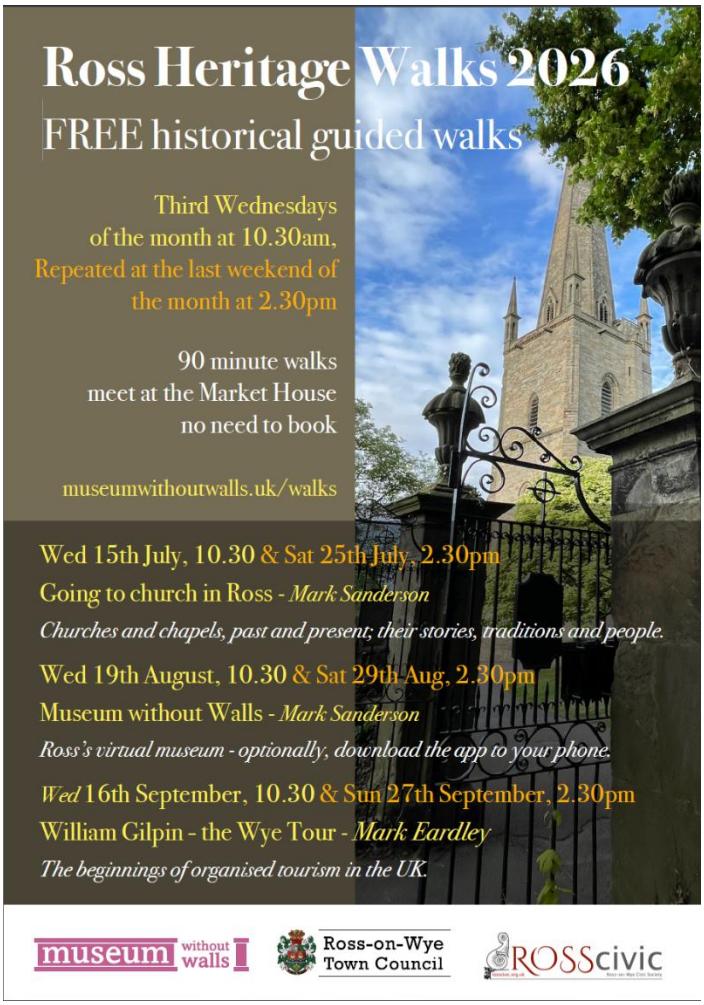




October: Our Vice President, Heather Hurley provided an interesting talk about some of the significant branch lines taken from her recent book “Railways of Herefordshire and the Southern Marches”. Following 3½ years of research, her book is a natural progression from previous work on horse-drawn tramways. This included the hardship of those building the railway network mixed with nostalgia, as we were treated to views before Dr Beeching’s cuts, of the long-gone rail network and stations in the area.



November: Another change in schedule as Angela Williams will tell us about “The Women the War turned Yellow - The Rotherwas Canary Girls”. This talk complements our May visit to The Shell Store and remnants of the Rotherwas Ordnance Factory



As well as our annual programme of talks and visits, Ross-on-Wye and District Civic Society has been heavily involved in producing a programme of **Ross Heritage Walks**. On the fourth Wednesday of the month, starting from the Market House, the walks are open to anyone.

We had two walks not listed in the later publicity poster. May: ***Almshouses Past and Present***, and June: ***The Forgotten Man of Ross*** (James Wallace Richard Hall) both lead by Heather Hurley.

In July, by request of Ross-on-Wye Town Council, this has been extended to a repeat walk during the following weekend.

The Society also supported the **Herefordshire Histories Festival**. Martin Cawthorne came from Chealsea to give a lecture on The Royal Hospital at War. This year marks the 80th anniversary commemoration, in the churchyard at St Mary's Church, of the memorial to the 22 Chelsea Pensioners and one officer who died during this evacuation. The Festival embraced the Heritage Walk Almshouses Past and Present and Heather Hurley also gave a talk on Horse Drawn Tramways at St. Lawrence Church, Weston-Under Penyard. There was also a historical Museum without Walls treasure hunt, with a bespoke prize from Made in Ross.



Sadly, in September we lost Shirley Preece, who died aged 92. Shirley was a founder member of the Civic Society and remained a member for the rest of her life. Shirley held the positions of chairman and president. She was influential in establishing the blue plaque scheme in the town, the Pink Publications, saving the James Wallace Richard Hall memorial and many other achievements. She was an honorary member in recognition of her service to the Civic Society.

I would like to thank the support and work undertaken by the Committee.

I would like to thank Julie Balsom for publicising the group through the Ross Gazette during the past year. This has certainly attracted a lot of interest in the Society and increased numbers attending our talks.

Likewise, I would like to thank Mark Sanderson for his work continually updating our website. It now looks more professional, clearer, and can be used to quickly reference material such as our monthly activities. I hope you will take time to look at it.

The Committee is still working to get our revised constitution recognised. It was accepted by members last year accepted but not by the Charity Commission. To remain as a registered charity, the Committee has decided to revert to the previously accepted 2014 Constitution, with the brief addition that:

> **The President shall not be in post for more than 5 years and**
> **The Chairperson for no more than 3 years**.

This does not apply to either the Vice Chair or Vice President.

The position of Chair of the Committee is only for 3 years.

I will be standing down, to make way for Mark Sanderson in his new role as Chairperson and will be supporting him in this role. We look forward to a successful 2027.

Mark Eardley